K Parker

Two Diſcourſes
Before the Univerſity of *Oxford*:

In which are contained

Remarks upon ſome Paſſages in the Writings of the late Lord Viſcount *Bolingbroke*.

2

The Nature, Evidences, and Importance of Truth conſidered.

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693. e. 7.
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SERMON

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY of *OXFORD*,

At St. *MARY*'s,

ON

St. ANDREW's DAY, 1754.

By WILLIAM PARKER D.D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY,
and F.R.S.

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MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

JOHN XVIII. 38.

Pilate ſaith unto Him, what is Truth?

WITH this queſtion a Roman deputy once left the court of judicature, having ſat upon the moſt important cauſe, that was ever tried upon earth, without waiting for a reply. And with ſimilar ſentiments, a late noble declamer in favour of ſcepticiſm hath given but too great reaſon to ſuſpect, that he left the world; inattentive to former vindications offered for the annals of revealed truth; not permitted by the limits of natural conſtitution to wait any longer for a reply.

It is much to be lamented by every ſerious well-wiſher to mankind, eſpecially by thoſe, who are appointed inſtructors in the word of truth, and have the information of the human intellect more particularly for the object of their concern, that a ſpirit of pyrrhoniſm is grown ſo prevalent in the preſent age. We have lived to ſee, within the ſpace of a few years, the moſt

obvious truths diſputed, not only in religion, but in all points of ſcience. Different motives may have excited the debates; while ſome have proceeded upon too refined a philoſophy, without any intention of doing miſchief; the ſprings of controverſy in others may not have ſo good a plea in their behalf.

The very exiſtence of all ſubſtances, whether material or immaterial has been the ſubject of queſtion, between authors of a different genius in thinking: ſome of whom have queried, whether our ſenſes may not deceive us in their reports concerning the reality of all corporeal objects: others have doubted, whether our intellects may not deceive us in their abſtract reaſoning about the exiſtence of any immaterial ſubſtances. Thus would theſe two ſpecies of writers joined together take between them every being both material, and immaterial out of the world at once. Although none of their proofs, by which they would eſtabliſh their conceits, can be more clear than this, that *ſomething* muſt exiſt, becauſe we are are conſcious that we ourſelves exiſt. And if we give up all evidence of ſenſe, we muſt give up at the ſame time the firſt inlets, and all the common evidence of truth, upon which men act in general.

Some

Some have denied the firſt principles of mathematical ſcience: more the foundations of moral and religious ſcience. The attributes of the deity, which one would think almoſt next to ſelf-evident truths, perhaps *are ſo* to beings of ſuperior intellects to ourſelves, being objects of their immediate intuition, have been brought into queſtion by thoſe who thought themſelves wiſe among men, becauſe it is ſaid we cannot adequately comprehend them in the abſtract.

No wonder then, that the noble writer, who in his *firſt Philoſophy* is ſo free in his reflexions upon the firſt principles of ſcience, ſo dubious about the neceſſary perfections of the author of all ſcience, ſhould in a prior work offered to the publick, which will principally furniſh me with remarks for the ſubject of this and a following diſcourſe, have endeavoured to take away all ground of credit from ancient hiſtorical narration, which admits only a degree of evidence much inferior to the former; eſpecially much inferior to mathematical proof. The paſſions too, and worldly purſuits of mankind are much leſs intereſted, and their prepoſſeſſions leſs likely to be alarmed by the abſtract deductions of a geometrical propoſition, than by more nearly affecting points of moral and hiſtorical ſpeculation. If the firſt principles of *mathematical* light then

cannot eſcape the darkening clouds of controverſy, need we wonder, that *hiſtorical* faith, whether civil or religious, ſhould ſuffer reproach under the tainting hands of the ſceptick?

Amidſt theſe clouds of controverſies, and controverting writers, puzzled by the mazes, into which various ſophiſtries have led them, without a proper light or clue of reaſon to conduct them through the labyrinth, many ſeem to grow indifferent about any truth, or rather diſpoſed to ask in the words of Pilate, *what is truth*? Some men ſeem almoſt tempted to think of truth, what Brutus ſaid once of virtue, "that ſhe is only "a mere name, not a reality."

The misfortune is, that where men ſet out with denying firſt principles in any ſcience, there remains nothing plainer to convince them. For ſome principles in moral and religious ſcience, like ſome propoſitions in mathematicks, ſeem, as it were, only to be demonſtrated *ex abſurdo*; i. e. from the abſurdity of admitting a contrary ſuppoſition, or of imagining them not to be true. It is dangerous therefore for young minds to ſet out with ſuch denials, or ſcruples about ſuch truths: becauſe it may be difficult for them to draw out the chain of reaſoning, that ſhall demonſtrate to them the abſurdity. A further misfortune therefore hath ariſen, that *ſome* by early,

or haſtily imbibed prejudices have blinded themſelves to all important truths: they have voluntarily ſhut their eyes againſt the light; or elſe *ſeeing, they will not ſee, and hearing they will not underſtand.*

Amidſt ſuch difficulties and diſcouragements, what can the friend of truth, or miniſter of the goſpel of truth attempt with hopes of ſucceſs? *If the foundations be caſt down* what can the preacher of righteouſneſs do to reform mankind, or to reeſtabliſh them in moral equity? where can the diſpenſer of revealed truth begin, but by endeavouring to give men a ſenſe of truth; to inform them of it's nature; to ſatisfy them of it's evidence; to convince them of it's importance; to infer it's obligations; to guide them gently into it's paths; to perſuade them, if they *can* be perſuaded, that truth, and eſpecially *ſacred* truth has a direct tendency to promote their ſureſt intereſt, both as individuals, and as ſocial beings: becauſe it will lead them to act as the nature of things, whereunto they ſtand related, and as their own nature requires; in the due diſcipline, gratification, and improvement of which their real happineſs is placed.

Whereas man, being of a compound frame, is too apt to indulge one part of his nature in oppoſition to the other; which is one ſource of voluntary

luntary oppoſition to truth; nay is itſelf an actual oppoſition to truth. It is a ſpontaneous oppoſition to what the real nature of things exiſting within ourſelves requires. For all error is not involuntary. But let men conſider, that as all truth is founded in the nature and relations of things, ſo conſequently muſt it be ſomething real. Thus founded, and thus real, it muſt be important; if it be important to act according to the natural cauſes of felicity, inſtituted by the deity in the nature of the things which he created.

All truths indeed may not be equally *important*; though all equally *real*. *Religious* truth muſt be important: becauſe it relates to the firſt author of being, and ſovereign diſpoſer of happineſs, and our duty to him, with whom we principally have to do; and on whoſe favour the whole ſum of our welfare depends. Religious truth is the right foundation of true moral conduct, with which happineſs is connected in the natural order of things.

It will not therefore, I hope, be thought unſeaſonable in the preſent times, eſpecially before the younger part of this audience, that they may not be drawn aſide from the purſuit of truth, even of *probable*, *hiſtorical* truth, by unreaſonable, inconſiſtent, and ill-ſupported ſuſpicions or

ſurmiſes

ſurmiſes raiſed againſt it, to inquire, in this, and a ſubſequent diſcourſe,

Firſt, wherein truth conſiſts; and what are the different capacities, and qualifications requiſite for the ready perception thereof;

Secondly, what are it's different kinds of evidence;

Thirdly, into the importance of truth;

Fourthly, into the injury they do to ſociety, who ſtudy by deluſive ſophiſtries to invalidate it's evidence; and likewiſe into ſome few inconſiſtencies of a late writer, who has endeavoured to undermine, or deſtroy the force of all probable argument;

Laſtly, what inferences may be drawn, under each diſcourſe, ſuitable to this place and audience.

Firſt then, truth conſiſts in conjoining thoſe ideas, whoſe objects ſtand united in nature; or in disjoining thoſe, whoſe objects mutually diſagree, according to the ſeveral agreements or diſagreements, the ſeveral habitudes, connexions, or relations of objects to each other. Wherever this conjunction, or ſeparation is made according

to

to nature, there is truth. The reverſe of theſe conjunctions or ſeparations is falſehood. Hence we ſee, that for the adequate diſcovery of truth, juſt and proper ideas of the objects muſt be acquired. Hence alſo we learn the difficulty of diſcerning truth, and the origin of many errors. Where the ideas of objects are imperfect, the apprehenſion of their ſeveral relations to each other will for the moſt part be obſcure, frequently confuſed, in few caſes very clear and determinate. Where the ideas are falſe, the conjunctions of them will in moſt caſes neceſſarily be wrong; or right only by accident.

Hence we ſee, that myſterious truths, or myſteries, as ſuch, will be relative merely to the intellects, that are employ'd about them. Thus the ſame truth ſhall be evident to the underſtanding of a ſuperior being, or to one of the ſame rank converſant in that particular branch of ſcience, of which an inferior or uncultivated intellect ſhall have very little, or perhaps no conception.

Hence we ſee likewiſe how ſtrong prepoſſeſſions, or invincible prejudices may ariſe. Men of quick parts, and lively apprehenſions are apt to receive haſty images of things. A confuſed medium, undue diſtances, or indiſpoſed organs are apt to occaſion wrong impreſſions. Perſons

of

of ſuch a genius are apt to compound haſtily ſimple ideas, or ſuch as are nearly ſimple, frequently imperfect ones, into more obſcure and imperfect complex ideas; deviating ſtill further from the relations of nature. An apparent ſimilitude ſhall give occaſion for a conjunction, where the realities are averſe. This latter is that work of the mind, which is called imagination or fancy; and the product thereof is what is frequently ſtiled wit. Now where lively intellects have received impreſſions, and conjoined ideas, they chuſe not the pains of altering thoſe impreſſions, of analyzing their ideas, or amending their complex notions. If organs indiſpoſed have repreſented *bitter for ſweet*, or *ſweet for bitter*, the objects will always be judged of, for the future, by the firſt injurious miſrepreſentation from the report of ill-diſpoſed ſenſes.

Thus complex ideas neceſſarily correſpond to ſimple ones; and falſe judgments attend upon falſe complexions of ideas. Objects at a diſtance are haſtily judged of by objects near: thoſe that are inviſible, by thoſe, with which we are daily converſant. Many have been miſtaken in their determinations of this ſort. Some have given the reins too far to imagination, which, as hath been obſerved, is nothing further than a free indulgence of the mind in haſty conjunctions or

ſeparations, on account of apparent ſimilitudes or diſſimilitudes: others for this reaſon have grown too jealous, doubtful, or ſceptical about any truth; whoſe intellects, if rightly applied, had been capable of more ſatisfactory information. Hence the pyrrhoniſt perceiving that men may be deceived in ſome things, will pretend to judge of none: bigotted nevertheleſs at the ſame time in his determinations againſt the judgment of others: diſtruſting every thing maintained by others: and, rather than his principle of ſcepticiſm ſhall give way to the authority of divine revelation, he will perſuade himſelf, that *nothing* is divinely revealed. It is ſurprizing how far men out of humour with the world, and with themſelves, will proceed in their jealouſies, and captious queries, and ſophiſtries againſt truth. Eſpecially where truth interferes with the uſual courſe of their own moral conduct.

But it is no wonder, that they, whoſe practice has long run counter to all eſtabliſhed notions of goodneſs and juſtice, ſhould maintain that goodneſs and juſtice are ſomewhat entirely different in the ſupream being from what they are in *them*; and therefore that we can have no conception of moral attributes in the deity; or of divine goodneſs and juſtice. It is true indeed, theſe attributes ought to be ſomewhat different

ferent in the deity from what they are in *them*: their own practice muſt have ſuggeſted this. But then the conſequence is very unphiloſophical. "Of divine goodneſs and divine juſtice," ſaith our author[a], "I am unable to frame any "adequate notions from God's works:" therefore it ſeems, they are not to be admitted as any principles at all of reaſoning. The argument amounts to this: of divine goodneſs and juſtice, we have no idea, becauſe we have not an adequate one. This is certainly a very ſtrained concluſion.

It is true indeed, we may not know, what either goodneſs or juſtice is, as exiſting in the divine nature, ſo far as to comprehend the whole plan or idea of it exiſting in the divine mind; we may not comprehend all it's excellence; all the ſentiments, if I may ſo call them, or motives attending the exerciſe of it in the deity: ſo far we may not underſtand it in the abſtract, if this may be called not underſtanding it in the abſtract, or it's abſolute eſſence. But ſtill we know, what *good* and *juſt* are in the concrete, as relative to created beings. We feel the effects of what we univerſally call, and underſtand by the words *goodneſs* and *juſtice:* we have the ſame idea of them in general, all the world over, whereſoever, or in whatſoever being they are ſaid

a See the philoſophical works.

to exiſt; and if they are not ſomewhat analogous to what we daily experience, in vain do we reaſon about any attributes or diſtant properties either of *wiſdom* or *power*; which he ſeems to acknowledge, and *them* only, in the *deity*.

For if wiſdom conſiſts in contriving a fit end, or proper means tending to that end; goodneſs conſiſts in contriving an end, that tends to the happineſs of every object, that is not unworthy of it; juſtice conſiſts in giving to every creature what is right, and due to it. So far we underſtand what we mean by either in the abſtract. And we ſee tendencies enough of this kind in nature to give us ample demonſtration of goodneſs and juſtice in the author of nature. We ſee the ſame effects are produced, as by the attributes which we term juſtice and goodneſs: if the end is by free and immoral agents ſometimes obſtructed, or prevented, and this is made by him an objection to the acknowledgment of moral attributes in the deity; we might as well on this account queſtion what he calls the *natural* attributes, which are the only ones, that he ſeems willing to acknowledge; we might as well queſtion wiſdom in the deſign, or power in the execution, as goodneſs in the intention, or juſtice in the diſtribution. We might as well ſuppoſe an imperfection of counſel in proportioning means

means to the deſign, or inability to ſupport thoſe means, as a defect of will to intend, or to diſtribute general felicity. Thus upon the ſame principles, or rather denial of all principles, we might give up all the attributes of the deity at once: from whence the tranſition will be very eaſy into doubtfulneſs about the exiſtence of a firſt cauſe to deſign or execute at all; and about the reality of all knowledge, even of our author's *firſt Philoſophy*. For a deity acting by chance will be little better than the ancient doctrine of chance without a deity.

This will tend haſtily to univerſal ſcepticiſm; if there can be any ſuch thing as *univerſal* ſcepticiſm: hardly indeed *can* there be, upon a little ſerious conſideration. For one thing *muſt* be granted, in oppoſition to the ancient doctrine of *no-certainty*; This muſt be *true* however, whether we perceive it or not; that things are, as they really are: this *muſt* be true, ſuppoſing any thing at all exiſtent; whether there be any intelligent being to perceive it or not; yet our own exiſtence ſeems to prove intelligent exiſtence. If they do exiſt, there is ſuch a thing as truth: they *do*, and *have* exiſted, in ſuch, or ſuch a manner; or elſe they have exiſted, and not exiſted, or been nothing, at the ſame time; which is abſurd. To ſay this, will be to give up all know-

ledge

ledge at once. If they *do*, and *have* exiſted in ſuch, or ſuch a manner, they certainly become objects of knowledge: and certainly deſerve our examination, as far as we ſtand related to them; as far as experience hath taught men, that they affect mankind. Here hiſtorical knowledge begins to have it's merit; as containing the annals of experience, or paſt exiſtence, and ſhewing how moral agents have been affected by the beings that ſurrounded them.

But to proceed in our inquiries concerning the qualifications requiſite for the perception of truth; we may obſerve then further, that as natural appetites may be depraved by irregular indulgences; ſo natural organs may thereby be corrupted, impaired, and diſqualified for the right reception of juſt and adequate ideas. The jaundiced eye will admit every ray of light with a yellow tincture. If this tincture be attended to in the conſequent operations of the mind, falſe judgments will be paſſed upon every viſible object before us. It is no wonder, that the eye of the *immoral ſoul* ſhould be jaundiced to every ray of religious truth, which enters with full directions to moral virtue. Evidence therefore will be called in queſtion, which is naturally clear, but only obſerved through a vicious medium. And as the rays of evidence, like the rays of ſolar

lar light, come with different degrees of ſtrength and moment, thoſe which proceed with leſs degrees of progreſſive force, will, in their paſſage through different mediums, be further refracted out of the ſtrait natural line, and turned from the way of truth. This remark leads us,

Secondly, to make ſome few obſervations upon the different evidences of truth.

Theſe depend upon the different nature of the objects, from whoſe relations it reſults, compared with the intellects employ'd about them. There are objects, whoſe relations are ſeen by immediate intuition. There are abſtract truths, which are ſelf-evident, as ſoon as propoſed to the mind: which by a kind of violence, as it were, conſtrain aſſent; the will of the deity thus ordaining in the very formation of the ſoul, and it's reflections upon it's own ideas. There are other truths, which flow by neceſſary conſequence from this intuitive knowledge, or theſe ſelf-evident propoſitions; ſo that if the one be true, the other muſt be true alſo. Such are all the truths evinced by what we call demonſtrative evidence. Again there is knowledge which recedes ſtill further from intuition, from ſelf-evidence, or demonſtration; which yet has all the evidence of truth, that the nature of things will

will admit; and truth being founded in the nature of things, greater ſurely cannot be expected, than is conſiſtent with that nature in which it exiſts: though this inferior kind of evidence then does not infer a propoſition to be ſo neceſſarily true, as that the contrary thereto ſhould involve a neceſſary abſurdity, yet this muſt be received as knowledge, for the neceſſary ends of life, and action, and happineſs. This is called *moral* aſſurance, *moral* certainty, *moral* evidence, or probability. Of this kind are all thoſe truths, whoſe evidence depends upon the teſtimony of others; teſtimony, whether divine, or human. The former muſt riſe in it's authority above the latter in proportion, as it is more ſtrongly proved to be divine: foraſmuch as we know, that an all-perfect being will not proclaim a falſhood, neither will he deceive his creatures.

Here then *ſacred* hiſtory begins to have it's weight. For an hiſtorical narration of facts already paſt, whatever our author may think of it, may certainly be inſpired, as well as a prophetick prediction of facts yet to come. All theſe degrees, and ſpecies of knowledge have their reſpective ends, and uſes, and evidence; and whether acquired by intuition, by deductions of reaſon, by teſtimony, or by immediate inſpiration, are all dependent upon faculties given by him,

who

who is the God of knowledge. If the deiſt rightly conſidered this, he might be leſs inclined to boaſt of the ſufficiency of his own reaſon ſet in competition with immediate inſpiration from God, the author of his reaſon likewiſe. For both are derived from God, either mediately or immediately. The difference only is, that whereas one is derived in an ordinary way, and operates and advances according to the common courſe of nature; the other is conveyed in a way equally eaſy to it's author, though extraordinary and ſupernatural with reſpect to man.

And if any perſon ſhall object to inſpiration, becauſe it is uncommon, or ſupernatural, let him prove, if he can, any abſurdity in the ſuppoſition, that the author of intellect may, for extraordinary moral purpoſes, communicate much greater degrees of knowledge to *one* ſoul than to *another*, or much clearer knowledge, or more diſtinguiſhing faculties, to one than to another; or knowledge in a much clearer and more immediate *manner* to one than to another: to ſay that a thing is uncommon, or extraordinary, is far from proving, that it is not real.

But we may obſerve likewiſe further, with regard to our author's very contemptuous treatment of the ſtudy of almoſt any truth, except hiſtorical, that all truths may not be equally uſeful any

more than their objects; nor all equally applicable to the common offices of life in proportion to their evidence, or ſeveral degrees of certainty. Some terminate merely in ſpeculation, eſpecially with reſpect to moſt minds converſant about them. Some, the further they recede from abſtract ſpeculation, and the more they are applied to outward objects, and intermix with common affairs of the world, the more ſerviceable they become to mankind. This is the caſe of mathematical truths, of late years applied to experimental reſearches and diſcoveries.

The uſefulneſs of all *hiſtorical* truth cannot be more ſtrongly illuſtrated, than in the encomiums paſſed upon it by the late noble writer already alluded to; who yet has proceeded further in his endeavours to undermine the credit of all ancient hiſtory, than any writer that ever undertook to ſpeak the praiſes of all hiſtorical inquiry, and to make hiſtory almoſt the only kind of ſcience worth our ſtudy. Let us obſerve the precautions with which he ſets out.

" [a] To diſſolve the charm of impoſitions or " enchanted caſtles in hiſtory, ſaith he, we muſt " begin at the beginning of them; we muſt ex- " amine ſcrupulouſly the foundations, on which " they lean." But what if afterwards he allows

a See letters on the ſtudy of hiſtory, vol. 1. p. 8, 9.

no

no authority of ancient hiſtories yet remaining, by which they are to be examined, or on which we may lean in our reſearches? What if all ſuch laborious examinations, and collations of parallel places in various ancient hiſtorians, which is the only accurate way "of examining ſcrupu-"louſly, from the beginning," is called by him, "only filling our heads with learned lumber[a]?" Shall the authority of all ancient hiſtory be tried by the verdict of mere modern inquiſition, without any deference to the examinations or judgment of our anceſtors in all preceding ages? Or can it be tried by thoſe our anceſtors in ſcience, without peruſing, canvaſſing, or paying any regard to the works, which they have left us? "We are to begin at the beginning:" and yet, it ſeems, there is no original authority, no collateral teſtimony from the beginning to ſupport us. The young pupil in the ſcience of the world is to ſtudy *univerſal* hiſtory: In order to be perfect in this ſtudy, "he is to begin at the begin-"ning, and to examine ſcrupulouſly:" and yet within a very few lines he is admoniſhed by the ſame author, rather to admit all the "anachro-"niſms of a Jewiſh chronologer, than fill his "head with learned lumber," by examining all that contemporary writers have ſaid upon an-

a Ib. p. 8, 9.

cient ſubjects. Such is the conſiſtency of this noble tutor's directions and admonitions in the very threſhold of his work, from whence he ſets forwards in his exhortations to the ſtudy of hiſtory! And thus far may be ſufficient to have remarked upon his advice at preſent.

It is an eaſy matter to declaim againſt the credit of hiſtory, ſacred, or profane: but we may juſtly query, whether it be ſo conſiſtent with this author's plan to derogate ſo much from the authority of ancient hiſtory, at the very time, when he is exhorting his pupil to the ſtudy of *univerſal* hiſtory, and to "begin at the beginning. For as much as there is no period of time, whoſe events have not connexions, either mediate or immediate, with thoſe of former times, till we arrive at the firſt æra of all things.

He ſeems to deſpiſe, and would by artful inſinuation bring into contempt many, if not moſt other beneficial ſtudies, in which he hath not been himſelf ſo freely converſant, as abſolutely uſeleſs: [a] "as only a ſpecious, and ingenious ſort "of idleneſs," ſuch are his words, "a kind of cre-"ditable ignorance, as tending neither to make "us better citizens, nor better men." This ſeems to be all the emolument, which he thinks the generality of men reap even from the ſtudy

a Ib. p. 14, 15 &c. compared.

of

of hiſtory, the advantage of a falſe eſteem, ariſing from a "creditable ignorance.

[a] "An application to any ſtudy, that tends "neither directly, nor indirectly, to make us bet-"ter men and better citizens," under which cenſure, compared with other paſſages of his writings, he ſeems deſirous artfully to include moſt of the graver, ſpeculative, uſeful ſtudies; every application of this kind, ſaith he, "is but a ſpe-"cious, and ingenious ſort of idleneſs, and the "knowledge we acquire by it is a creditable "kind of ignorance, nothing more. This cre-"ditable kind of ignorance is, in my opinion, "the whole benefit, which the generality of "men, even of the moſt learned, reap from the "ſtudy of hiſtory; and yet the ſtudy of hiſtory "ſeems to me, of all other, the moſt proper to "train us up to private, and publick virtue." He had but a very few lines before ridiculed the "[b] drudgery of grammarians and critics;" by whoſe labours nevertheleſs great improvement has been made of late years in claſſical learning; great light been reflected even upon that part of it, which conveys to us ancient hiſtory, and opens the view of claſſical antiquity. The learned inquirer into ancient days, and ſearcher of æras, the induſtrious antiquarian and chronologer, to-

a P. 14, 15. b P. 4——9.

gether

gether with the very laborious lexicographer, had not eſcaped his ſevere notice: though chronology has been always juſtly eſteemed the handmaid to hiſtory, and the lexicographer furniſheth us with the key to ancient languages, in which hiſtory is tranſmitted down to us.

But to take no further notice here, how much he derogates at the ſame time from the only ſtudy that he allows, one might beg leave to aſk, what kind of inquiry after truth is there to be conceived, that can be pronounced abſolutely, and entirely uſeleſs; that has not in ſome ſenſe or other, either directly or indirectly, a tendency to improve, and make men wiſer, and better, and conſequently happier; better as individuals, and conſequently better members of ſociety? Every refinement of the human intellect is a kind of melioration of the natural mind. Induſtry in our purſuits of knowledge may, at leaſt, be a guard of virtue, if it is nothing more; and by being an employment in that which is harmleſs, may be a ſecurity from falling into that which is vicious. For the mind *muſt* be employ'd ſome way or other. And the amuſements in the ſearch of truths, which are not of importance, if we can ſay what are not, may be exerciſes of the intellect, intended for it's employment, to keep it from ſtagnation in indolence,

as

as the body has it's different kinds of exerciſe, for the preſervation of it's health, and vigour.

I ſhould now therefore proceed to make ſome few remarks upon the importance of truth, of whatever nature it's evidence may be, and to conſider the injury which they do to ſociety, who ſtudiouſly endeavour to invalidate the evidence and authority of truth in general: adding ſome few further obſervations upon the inconſiſtency of the noble writer's objections to all common evidence of hiſtorical truth, with his only plan of uſeful ſtudy. But to ſatisfy theſe heads, would tire your patience too much at preſent. I ſhall beg leave therefore to reſerve them for the ſubject of another diſcourſe; and ſhall conclude this with a ſhort inference from what has hitherto been obſerved, ſuitable to this time and place.

It is the creditable province of thoſe, who reſide in theſe ſeats of literature, to be employed in the purſuit or communication of truth. This was the good and pious intention of thoſe, who firſt fixed, and endowed theſe ſeats, to prepare young perſons for the future inveſtigation, or promulgation of ſalutary truths, important to man, whether conſidered in his natural, moral, civil, or religious capacity: for in each of theſe capacities truth highly affects him. In the fuller

proſecution of this deſign, you will be differently engaged, according to your different ſtations or provinces hereafter aſſigned you by providence in life. But then remember, there are univerſal principles, common to all, to be imbibed in ſeaſon, within theſe nurſeries of ſcience, as elements of future vegetation in knowledge: the elements of future vegetation, if I may ſo call it, to opening minds; which will be diverſified by their future neceſſary employments. Endeavour therefore to prepare yourſelves betimes for theſe employments, by treaſuring up in the ſpring of life a proper ſtore of principles, by laying a good foundation of elemental literature. For, if you are hereafter to ſearch for materials, when you ought to build; or begin to build without a ſolid foundation, the ſuperſtructure will go on but heavily, and the edifice itſelf be tottering and unſteady; ready to be ſhaken down by the firſt blaſt of oppoſing wind, becauſe it is founded upon the ſand.

Various occupations and profeſſions in life will hereafter require in you various kinds of knowledge, and principles well-eſtabliſhed in various kinds of truth: eſpecially in an age, which ſets up for maſterſhip in ſcience. Let no man too haſtily, or contemptuouſly deſpiſe that truth in purſuit of which his neighbour is engaged. For all truth

truth will be of uſe to moral agents; all at leaſt, when diſcovered, will be pleaſing to intellectual beings. Univerſal ſcepticiſm muſt be a kind of gloomy maze. Truth is the object of all ſcience: and certain acknowledged principles of truth are the only light, by which the traveller in ſcience can direct his ſteps. The attainment, and illuſtration of truth will be the principal aim of every one engaged in any profeſſion of ſcience, who acts with honour, and conſiſtently with duty in his profeſſion. If every one were ſincerely to make this his aim, and to conduct himſelf uniformly according to the directions, and conſequences of truth diſcovered, whenſoever, or howſoever made known, whether by reaſon, or by revelation, without any bias of prejudice, immoral appetite, or hypocriſy, the reſult muſt redound to the glory of God, and the welfare of ſociety; in which the welfare of each individual muſt neceſſarily be included.

That we may all, according to our reſpective ſtations in the body ſocial, conſider, examine, and act thus, looking upon ourſelves at the ſame time as created, dependent, and therefore concerned to be religious, as well as ſocial beings, God of his infinite mercy and aſſiſtance grant through the merits of Chriſt Jeſus, and the guidance of his Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

The Nature, Evidences, and Importance of Truth conſidered.

693. e. 7.
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A

SERMON

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY of *OXFORD*,

At St. *MARY*'s,

ON

ADVENT-SUNDAY, *Dec.* 1. 1754.

By WILLIAM PARKER D. D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY,
and F. R. S.

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JOHN XVIII. 38.

Pilate ſaith unto Him, what is Truth?

WHATEVER might have been the intent of Pilate in aſking this queſtion, whether merely to ſcoff at our Saviour's doctrine, or to cavil, where he had nothing reaſonable to object; we find it was not aſked with a deſire of information: for he did not wait for a reply. How lightly ſoever perſons in ſubſequent ages may have thought upon the ſubject, yet one point is well worthy of their notice, that truth is deeply founded in the nature and relations of things: and it will have it's weight, and influence on our happineſs, whether we eſteem it, or not. It conſiſts in aſſertions or denials made according to nature and the relations of objects, according to their agreements or diſagreements with each other. The juſtice or rectitude of theſe aſſertions, or denials, and the conſequent perſuaſions ariſing from them will have a ſtrong effect upon moral action: and moral action is

cloſely

cloſely connected with natural happineſs or miſery.

What one kind of truth or falſhood is, truth in common converſation, and how great it's importance in ſocial life; we are all pretty well ſenſible, even without a definition. We know it to be a repreſentation of things, or facts, as they really are: falſhood the reverſe. We are no leſs ſenſible of the ill effects ariſing from a general violation of truth in common life. Yet wherein is the principal harm ariſing from hence, but that it draws our fellow beings into falſe perſuaſions concerning things to which they ſtand related, into conſequent miſconduct, and error of action, in the common concerns of life? And if truth current in common converſation be of ſuch moment, ſhall not truth recorded in writing be judged of equal concern at leaſt? the violation or miſrepreſentation of it be eſteem'd an equal treſpaſs upon mutual confidence? for what are books, but written language, or written converſation addreſſed to the world, inſtead of ſingle perſons? and may not falſhood propagated, or truth miſrepreſented therein, be much more fatally miſchievous, as the venom may become more diffuſed? This ſhould excite men to be zealous in the defence of truth, for the common benefit of mankind, of individuals, and the body ſocial.

Pro-

Probable truth, we know, is at beſt oftentimes hardly to be diſcerned; eſpecially where objects are but imperfectly known, and conſequently the relations are but obſcurely ſeen. This is the foundation of myſteries to inferior underſtandings like thoſe of men, which to ſuperior capacities are well-comprehended truths. Yet, even with reſpect to the inferior faculties, there may be evidence enough to ſatisfy, that the relations of objects exiſt, though there is not ability enough to comprehend perfectly, or perſpicuity enough to demonſtrate mathematically the manner *how* they exiſt. But what can be the merit of ſtudying to perplex truth, where open ſignatures of reality are found, if there *be* ſuch a thing as reality? It will be our prudence then, the diſcretion at leaſt of thoſe who are juſt entring upon the ſtage of knowledge and experience, to be upon their guard againſt ſuch authors, as argue againſt principles acknowledged in all preceding ages. It will be their juſt caution at leaſt, not to deny truths by hypotheſis, or merely upon a principle of adherence to ſome ſceptical author. For is it more probable, to inſtance only in *one* caſe, that hiſtorians of all ages ſhould have been determined voluntary impoſtors, or that the man who could aſſert, or ſurmiſe ſuch general deluſion to be, if I may ſo expreſs it,

it, impoſed by whole-ſale, ſhould have been himſelf grievouſly out of humour with mankind, extremely jealous, or extremely prejudiced againſt his fellow-creatures, to ſuſpect ſo heavily their opinions or their honeſty?

In my laſt diſcourſe upon the words of the text I propoſed to inquire,

Firſt, wherein truth conſiſts; and what are the different capacities, and qualifications requiſite for the ready perception thereof;

Secondly, what are it's different kinds of evidence;

Thirdly, into the importance of truth;

Fourthly, into the injury they do to ſociety, who ſtudy by deluſive ſophiſtries to invalidate it's evidence; and likewiſe into ſome few inconſiſtencies of a late writer, who has endeavoured to undermine, or deſtroy the force of all probable argument;

Laſtly, what inferences may be drawn, under each diſcourſe, ſuitable to this place and audience.

It hath been obſerved then, in my former diſcourſe, that the evidences of truth are different, accord-

according to it's different kinds of objects correſpondent in nature: conſequently he, who demands a different kind of evidence from that which the nature of things admits, is unreaſonable; becauſe he acts inconſiſtently with the nature and relations of things, which require his aſſent. For evidences are not always proportioned to the importance of the truth propoſed. Hiſtory admits only of *probable* evidence, yet the importance of hiſtory is univerſal. It is one of the great privileges of a rational being, agreeably to the ſentiments of a learned heathen, to compare the paſt with the preſent, and from thence in the connective chain of events to infer the future.

Ancient patriarchal hiſtory, as recorded in the books of Moſes, may perhaps be thought by ſome to have little relation to *us*: but ſurely whatever comes to us with divine credentials, as a revelation of the will of the creator from the creator himſelf, muſt be of conſequence. As it ſerves to diſtinguiſh ſome of the firſt æras of the world, but eſpecially as far as it points at goſpel truth, and contains any thing predictive or prefigurative of goſpel revelation, it muſt be of greater moment. All ſucceeding hiſtory, as it opens gradually, till it arrives at the full diſplay of this revelation, muſt be of the higheſt importance, as

it is one of the ſtrongeſt proofs of the divine original of the goſpel, drawn from the completion of prophecies, the accompliſhment of ancient types and figures. This leads us then,

Thirdly, to make ſome few remarks upon the importance of truth, whatever it's evidence may be.

And here nothing can be ſaid of it more important than this, that truth is the light and guide of life. Whoſoever walketh in ignorance, walketh in darkneſs, and knoweth not whither he goeth. Therefore was Jeſus called *the light of the world*, becauſe he came to reveal, *and bear witneſs unto the truth*. As truth is founded in the nature of things, and is cloſely inherent in their very eſſence; ſo happineſs muſt be connected with it: foraſmuch as happineſs muſt ariſe from the conformity of our nature to the intentions of objects with which we are connected. Falſe notions of objects therefore lead men into falſe purſuits of happineſs, and are the great foundations of diſappointment, which is the ground of miſery.

Truth then, and true conceptions of things, ought to be the firſt and prevailing object of our purſuit, in the purſuit of true felicity. It's importance may not always be proportioned to it's evidence; nor conſequently is it neceſſary that

every

every ſtudy ſhould be equally important to *every* man, any more than that *every* truth ſhould be ſo. Relations to different objects will make different truths important. Raſhly therefore doth he argue, who would have all men engaged in the purſuit only of one, and the ſame truth. However *one* there is univerſally neceſſary, and the purſuit of that one, will certainly denote the the higheſt diſcretion and prudence, which conducts to the moſt ſolid, and permanent happineſs. The ſtudy of revelation, if God hath made a revelation, (and ſurely it muſt be of conſequence to moral agents to inquire, whether the creator hath revealed his will or not,) muſt be the moſt intereſting of all ſtudies. It is the advantage of the generality of thoſe who have the happineſs to be educated in this place, that their time is dedicated to this moſt *important* ſtudy, for ſo we may venture to ſtile it, as in one place it is ſo ſtiled by our author himſelf[a].

But the purſuit of any truth almoſt, except hiſtorical, is in other places held very cheap by him: and even this is very much degraded in general below the dignity of ſcience. Indeed for any man to beſtow a great deal of time upon that, which has no viſible end or uſe, may be trifling in effect, and a kind of

[a] P. 173.

comparative idleneſs. And where intuitive knowledge, univerſally acknowledged principles, or propoſitions mathematically demonſtrated are plainly repugnant, the purſuit can hardly not appear ridiculous. But ſtill no *real* truth is without *ſome* conſequences: and therefore haſtily to pronounce the ſearch after *any* to be abſolutely void of all poſſible uſe, becauſe the end is not immediately viſible to us, is certainly a very bold, if not preſumptuous aſſertion at leaſt; and a very contemptuous way of treating the judgment of thoſe, who are engaged therein. All philoſophical inquiries certainly have their poſſible ends and uſes; eſpecially all modern reſearches into the receſſes of nature have been ſhewn by experience to convey their reſpective benefits to mankind in general, though not viſible to every incurious eye; as they have their connexions with nature, or as they are induſtrious travels after her, in ſearch of her relations. Particular experimental uſes have ſometimes been ſtruck out, after the general ſpeculative principles have been long diſcovered, and effects have been thereby ſatisfactorily linked on to their proper cauſes. Witneſs the late application of geometrical propoſitions to natural experimental philoſophy. For where laws of action can be deduced by geometrical principles, the cauſe ſhewn equal to the effect,

effect, the effect exactly correſpondent to the cauſe, neither greater, nor leſs, but accurately proportioned, and experiment joins in concert to confirm the deduction, ſuch knowledge muſt be very ſatisfactory, and pleaſing to the human mind, as well as very beneficial to individuals, and to human ſociety. It is wrong to imagine, that all valuable knowledge, or uſeful ſtudy ſhould be confined merely to political narrations of hiſtory.

All laborious collections of words in different languages and tranſlations of them into the mother language of each country, how much ſoever the taſk may be ridiculed by our author [a], are ſo many obligations heaped upon mankind by the compilers. The labour may appear dull to men of quick and lively genius; but the more tedious, and leſs entertaining the labour, the greater is the obligation confered upon mankind thereby. For how would our author's own pupils be ſo well or eaſily qualified for the ſtudy of univerſal hiſtory, in all the learned languages, without ſuch operoſe aſſiſtances prepared ready to their hands; if every man were firſt to compile his own gloſſary in each language, before he began? A work of life muſt precede the entrance of each pupil upon the ſtudy of hiſtory.

a P. 5.

Again,

Again, the ſpeculative geometrician may be ridiculed by men whoſe only talent is a little rhetorical wit, perhaps only a little, low, ſmart buffoonry. Whereas great openings have been made into the wonders of nature, and the marvellous works of providence by the ſlow reſearches of the geometrical philoſopher, and many uſeful diſcoveries deduced by mathematical laws.

There is in ſhort, as Tully ſays of virtues, a kind of concatenation of truths among each other, ſo that one naturally infers another; where we did not perhaps at firſt perceive the connexion, or the ſeveral links of argument in the connecting chain. Wherever we find any man therefore treating almoſt every rational, generous kind of purſuit after truth, but his own, with contempt, we may in general with good reaſon ſuſpect him of great pride, and ſelf-conceit, of an high opinion about his own abilities, and knowledge, and ſkill in the application of his abilities. Whereas all men's minds were not originally formed or intended for the ſame ſtudies, any more than all men's bodies were faſhioned for the ſame labours. Society, and the very ends of ſocial life require a difference in both. So that we may apply to different talents of the ſoul, what *St. Paul* writeth, under the ſame metaphor,

taphor, of different members of the body; *if the whole were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the ſmelling? But now hath God* diſpenſed the different talents of the ſoul, *as it hath pleaſed him*, and every talent hath it's proper uſes in the body ſocial.

Of the importance of truth *hiſtorical* let our author ſpeak his ſentiments in his own words: only let us firſt obſerve, that hiſtorical evidence is at beſt but *probable:* nay he will not ſometimes allow to *ancient* hiſtory any degree even of probability itſelf: but this is to run into extreams, as I have obſerved, inconſiſtent with his own plan of ſtudy. Evidence indeed may be leſs cogent, the higher we advance up into ancient days: light, the further you recede from the luminous body, it is certain, grows leſs glaring, leſs diſtinct and forcible in it's impreſſions: but ſtill this proves not, that there is no reality of exiſtence in that body, or that the rays proceeding from it are not real rays, but phantoms. Let us however attend to this author's encomiums upon hiſtorical inſtruction. "[a] Hiſ-"tory, ſaith he, is philoſophy ſpeaking by ex-"ample: [b] the ſchool of example is the world: "the maſters of this ſchool hiſtory, and expe-"rience. [c] By hiſtory, ſaith he, a man may ac-

a P. 40, 41. b P. 15. c P. 20.

"quire

"quire in a few years, the experience of more "centuries, than any of the patriarchs ſaw. But let us juſt obſerve here, that ſoon after we are confined by him in our hiſtorical credit, within the ſhort line of two hundred years upwards immediately preceding our own days. Yet ſaith he, "[a] by hiſtory we are caſt back, as it were, "into former ages; we live with the men, who "lived before us; and we inhabit countries that "we never ſaw. [b] It ſhews us cauſes as in fact "they were laid, with their immediate effects; "and it enables us to gueſs at future events. "Again, [c] hiſtory is converſant about the paſt; "and by knowing the things that *have* been, we "become better able to judge of the things that "are." Such are the praiſes of hiſtory allowed by our author, and ſuch is his conſiſtency in reaſoning!

Now if ſuch be the juſt commendations of hiſtorical knowledge in general, as much ſurely may be ſaid with equal juſtice at leaſt of *ſacred* hiſtory, which contains the annals of divine revelation, and divine oeconomy with moral agents, according to their reſpective exigencies and occaſions. Conſequently it muſt contain inſtruction as important at leaſt, as any that is convey'd by the records of experience in *profane* hiſtory, and therefore ought to obtain equal

a P. 40. b P. 49. c P. 67. atten-

attention at leaſt to it's proofs, being derived from the God of knowledge, paſt, as well as preſent, who ſeeth throughout the whole line of experience at once.

Since therefore ſuch is the importance of truth, ſuch the uſes of hiſtorical ſcience, let us now proceed,

Fourthly, to examine the injury they do to ſociety, who endeavour to invalidate the evidence, and authority of truth; and to make a further remark or two upon the inconſiſtencies of our author, who has labour'd to undermine or deſtroy the force of all probable argument.

The principles of moral and religious truth, with their neceſſary deductions, are the only ſecure ſource and cement of ſocial union. Hiſtory is a confirmation of theſe principles, and the juſtice of theſe deductions, by experience. The more then you contract the ſtream of hiſtorical knowledge, in it's current from the fountain head of time, the more you reduce thoſe confirmations deducible from experience, which give ſtrength and vigour to moral principles. If all ancient *profane* hiſtory is to be traduced as [a] romance, where will be the great uſe of reading, what our author preſcribes alone to be read?

a See P. 82, 105, 115, 118, 122, 131.

where will be the benefit of conſidering, as to experimental knowledge, what never exiſted in fact? If all *ſacred* hiſtory is to be ſet aſide as [a] impoſture, and yet revealed religion, as he aſſerts, [b] is only to be proved by hiſtorical evidence, where ſhall we chriſtians go for proofs of our religion? Is not this deſiring us to give up all proofs of our religion at once, and then to ſay, that there is no religion? In ſhort, according to theſe tenets, what hiſtory remains for the accompliſhment of the fine gentleman? ſince hiſtory, it appears, is to be his principal, if not his ſole accompliſhment. For the narrations of *modern* times may, by his own account, be liable to *equal* exception at leaſt, nay perhaps have actually had equal exceptions made to them, even the very beſt of them, by equally ſceptical modern writers. Becauſe if we have leſs acquaintance with *ancient* facts, it may be ſaid, we are apt to have more partiality about *modern* ones. Writers contemporary with the facts they relate, or nearly contemporary, it may be ſaid, will always be liable to exceptions of party-prejudice, as thoſe who write of diſtant times, are liable to exceptions of imperfect information in facts. " [c] Contemporary writers, ſaith our author, are the " moſt liable to be warped from the ſtrait rule

[a] See P. 83, 85, 87. [b] P. 175, 185. [c] P. 135.

" of

"of truth." A terrible ſhock this given by himſelf to the credit of modern hiſtory!

Almoſt every ſpecies of learning then is, in ſome place or other of his writings, repreſented by him as uſeleſs and ridiculous, but hiſtorical, and yet this is placed upon a very precarious foundation. It is hiſtory alone, that we are to depend upon for a proper rule of life, and yet in the next pages of his book we are advertiſed, that we have no reaſonable dependence upon *this* rule. What is this, but to inform me, that I have no ground in ſcience to ſet my foot upon, but this ſingle ſpot, which he points out before me; and yet that this ſpot is ſo ſlippery, ſo fallacious, ſo hollow, and ſuch treacherous ground, that I cannot with any ſafety reſt my foot there? An uncomfortable proſpect ſurely this, at ſetting out in ſcience; to be under obligations of ſtepping forwards, and yet to have no ground to walk upon without peril!

Our author ſeems apprehenſive of this objection to his letters, that [a] univerſal pyrrhoniſm might be eſtabliſhed upon his principles, and therefore puts on the maſk of guarding againſt it? But whilſt he aims to exert his talent of wit upon the ſceptick, [b] he either does not, or

a P. 137. b P. 134, 169.

pretends not to ſee, that his own principles run deep into *univerſal* ſcepticiſm.

He aſſerts it to have been a long matter of aſtoniſhment to him, "[a] why chriſtian divines have "taken ſo much ſilly pains to eſtabliſh myſtery "on metaphyſicks, revelation on philoſophy, "and matter of fact on abſtract reaſoning." Objections ſimilar to this have incautiouſly been made by others againſt ſome of our ableſt and moſt pious divines, and therefore may deſerve an anſwer. The reaſon of ſuch pains is but too clear and manifeſt. For will not the unbeliever expect to be anſwered in the ſcience within the ſphere of which his objection is ſtated, or from whence his principle is taken? In order to convince the objector, will it not be neceſſary to prove either that the principle aſſumed by him is not true, or the conſequence not rightly deduced? So far the argumentation will naturally fall within ſome learned ſcience, perhaps of metaphyſicks, or ſome other branch of philoſophy and abſtract reaſoning. Thus far the proofs or illuſtrations of different points of divinity may lie within different branches of ſcience. And thus far the pains beſtowed upon theſe ſciences, and the topicks of argument deduced from thence will neither be *ſilly* nor uſeleſs. For is the theo-

[a] P. 175.

logiſt

logiſt to prove, or illuſtrate by any *one* ſcience only, that which naturally falls under the province of *another*? The unbeliever by ſuch means might gain advantages over his chriſtian antagoniſt, which our author probably could have wiſhed him. For is a metaphyſical doubt to be ſettled by hiſtory? Is a logical queſtion to be anſwer'd by hiſtorical ſolution? Is a phyſical ſcruple to be ſatisfied by hiſtorical narration? Our author ſurely muſt have ſeen the weakneſs and fallacy of ſuch reaſonings. They are in ſhort the diſputers of this world, who make metaphyſicks, philoſophy, and abſtract reaſoning much oftener neceſſary in divinity, than they otherwiſe would be. Beſides, where is the harm of confirming, illuſtrating, or inculcating important truths by principles of *any* ſcience, which may be judged beſt adapted to the purpoſe? An age, that profeſſes ſcience, ſeems to be ſatisfied only with arguments deduced from learned ſcience. Revelation reſting only upon hiſtorical ground, or it's own internal aſſertions, will not ſatisfy all; with many will not have it's full weight and influence. The morals of the goſpel are, in this age, required to be proved not inconſiſtent with moral principles founded in the laws of nature: the doctrines of the goſpel, though in ſome points ſuperior to the adequate reach of human philo-

philoſophy, yet not abſolutely contradictory to principles of human abſtract reaſon. And further, in the illuſtration or inculcation of moral truths, various topicks of argument, various motives for inforcement, various figures in deſcription, may be very appoſitely borrowed, and accommodated to the purpoſe from various arts and ſciences.

This ſuggeſts a ſerious inference or two from what has been offered in theſe two diſcourſes, applicable to thoſe, who are ſituated for education in this place; of which they will find the importance, as ſoon as they enter upon their reſpective employments in life, particularly they who are deſigned for the ſacred office of the clergy.

The different kinds of truth, that exiſt in the world, and have their relation to us, and are the ſubject of modern ſpeculation and converſation, the various ways in which truth may be conveyed, rendered conſpicuous, and inforced, require applications to different kinds of ſcience in thoſe, who are deſirous to be common friends of truth, and to diſcharge the duties of their reſpective callings with fidelity, eſpecially thoſe who are by their vocation appointed miniſters of the word of truth. In this age of profeſſed literature a greater degree of knowledge will be required of thoſe, who have received an educa-

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tion within theſe nurſeries of learning, than would have been needful in darker ages. Among the laity *this* perſon may excell in *one* branch of ſcience, *that* in another; it may perhaps hardly be more ſafe for him, who is called to be the miniſter of the word of truth, than for the orators of old amongſt the Romans, to be *entirely* ignorant almoſt in any. *The prieſts lips are to retain knowledge*; he muſt have a mind opened and prepared to comprehend, and a mouth ready to explain truth. At this fountain the thirſty are to drink: happy is it for them, if when they aſk, he is both willing and able to ſupply them with *living water!*

But let it be remembered, that every degree of finite knowledge is relative, all ſuperiority of knowledge is comparative; being greater, or leſs, in proportion to the intellects of thoſe, with whom it is compared: all inſtruction is to be adapted to the capacity of the learner, and ſuited to the nature of the truth delivered, or occaſionally defended. Hiſtories are to be confirmed; cuſtoms explained; parables unveiled; metaphors cleared; ſeeming inconſiſtencies reconciled; languages tranſlated; idioms aſcertained; precepts inforced; motives urged; affections excited. Application in the years of youth, and much ſubſequent induſtry will be requiſite for

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the right diſcharge of theſe ſeveral offices. The man of God muſt be, in the language of our ſaviour, *like an houſholder well furniſhed, that bringeth forth out of his treaſures things new, and old.* He muſt be maſter of diſcoveries in ſcience ancient, and modern, that he may occaſionally make a proper uſe of them to the general improvement of his hearers.

Wherefore, as the burthen upon him is great in reſpect to abſtract ſpeculation, that he may be the more fully at leiſure to attend the taſk, the leſs he is encumbered with wordly avocations, eſpecially the man who principally dedicates his time to any of theſe ſtudies; an inference may be urged upon thoſe who ſhall hereafter live in any degree of dignity, or office of magiſtracy among the laity; that they endeavour to make this burthen as eaſy as they can, by making the burthen of wordly cares ſit as light upon him as poſſible. The man dedicated to abſtract ſtudies ſhould not be overladen with neceſſary concerns of daily ſuſtenance, which will *preſs down the ſoul* in her efforts to *muſe upon many things.* Worldly cares will intrude themſelves, and nature will force them upon him, where a ſufficient proviſion is not made of temporal conveniences; much uſeful pious ſtudy has been prevented by neceſſary attention to worldly

worldly buſineſs. To make the journey through life as eaſy as poſſible, to ſupply his kindred, and neceſſary dependents, that travel with him towards a better, with all convenient accommodations in the way, eſpecially to vindicate thoſe rights, and maintain thoſe conveniencies, wherewith the ſtate, in which he is converſant, ſupplies him, whatever may be our author's reproaches upon the clergy, will yet be the laudable deſire of every good and virtuous man. It is the call of prudence; it is the call of nature; it is an univerſal obligation of humanity and honour. Such a watchful care in every man over himſelf, and family, and his ſocial rights, has a natural tendency to the good of the community; whoſe welfare is compounded of that of individuals, excited by their reſpective honeſt ſolicitude for thoſe, that ſtand nearly related to them in nature.

Let not the laity therefore grudge any little emoluments granted by the piety of their forefathers towards the ſupport of a chriſtian miniſtry, or towards the education of men in ſuch ſeminaries of ſcience as this, who may be future defenders of truth; who may oblige the world with new and uſeful diſcoveries, and be ſucceſſive ornaments to their country. Neither give the clergy difficulty in the recovery of their juſt

rights; but labour to prevent difficulty. Since all ſuch time as is beſtowed in diſputes upon thoſe ſubjects, will in effect be ſtolen from your own ſpiritual improvement. Oblige not the clergy to maintain ſuits, which ill-wiſhing, uncharitable men may afterwards injuriouſly interpret vexatious or oppreſſive, though neceſſarily commenced for the recovery or preſervation of their ſmall patrimony, if I may ſo ſtyle it, inherited in deſcent from the generoſity of ancient, pious benefactors; and where the voice of nature perhaps urged moſt powerfully for the ſecurity of all the little livelyhood, that their reſpective ſtation in their profeſſion admitted. Much leſs ſuffer any to harraſs or perplex them with ſuits, merely becauſe it is known, that they are ill able to maintain a ſuit. This is not chriſtianity; this is not common humanity. But the friend of truth will be a friend of right and equity; a friend and patron, and promoter of benevolence towards every place, and perſon engaged in the inveſtigation or communication of uſeful, ſalutary ſcience.

It will be the future province of ſome educated in this place, and before whom I now ſpeak, to be employed in the inveſtigation and ſupport of ſuch truth, as is very important to *ſocial* beings, of civil, equitable, and legal truth; for the

the detection and punishment of fraud under all it's secret covers; for the protection of commutative or distributive justice, and the maintenance of civil right. A study necessary to the welfare of mankind, so long as men shall be created necessarily social beings, and many among them shall retain and cultivate very *unsocial* dispositions. To those then, who are intended for this study I would beg leave to observe, that *this* also, as well as *religious* science, is founded not upon mathematical, demonstrative, but upon probable, moral evidence. Such persons therefore will soon be sensible, what mischief is done to social establishment by all endeavours to invalidate the evidence of moral truth. Universal scepticism, or a distrust of all truth would be inconsistent with the principles of such a profession: for law supposes credit given to probable, historical evidence. Our author himself insists on the strong obligation lying upon persons engaged in the honourable profession of the law to apply themselves to history, in a remarkable passage, where he takes an opportunity of detracting as virulently from the general character of the modern professors of the law, as he had before incautiously, and very inconsistently done, from the credit and dignity of his own favourite science, that of history, and the writers that have signa-

lized themſelves therein, the greateſt number of hiſtorians, ancient, and modern. For in this paſſage he excepts very few, if he would willingly except any, of the modern profeſſors of the law, out of the ſevere cenſure of "groveling all "their lives in a mean but gainful application to "all the little arts of chicane[a]." From hence we learn his charitable opinion of other profeſſions, as well as of the clergy.

Thus far however we may accord with him, that civil inquiries muſt oftentimes begin with the knowledge of civil hiſtory, and therefore ſome certainty in the evidence of civil hiſtory, whether ancient, or modern muſt be preſuppoſed. The reaſon of ancient laws is founded in the circumſtances, and ſtate of things: and therefore we can never be ſatisfied, that we are fully acquainted with the reaſon and intent of theſe laws, unleſs we can rely upon the hiſtorical relation of the facts, that occaſioned theſe enactions.

I might now further enlarge, from what has been ſaid, upon the uſefulneſs of theſe ſeats of literature, where the materials of future knowledge are early taken in, and preparations made for future experience in life. I might urge the hazard of ſetting out early in doubtfulneſs about eſtabliſhed principles, or of cultivating ſuch mo-

[a] P. 185, 186.

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rals as may be the ſprings of ſcepticiſm, or of imbibing early prejudices againſt mankind, or their received opinions, merely perhaps becauſe they *are* received: but this would carry me too far at preſent.

How ill, unſteady a friend moral ſcepticiſm is to the eſtabliſhed order of political ſocieties, we have but too ſtrong an inſtance in one, who was born with abilities capable of becoming very uſeful in the body politick: and it is no wonder, that the author alluded to ſhould merit ſo little confidence in political hiſtory, who hath induſtriouſly made it appear by his late legacy to the world, that he raiſed his ſuperſtructure, whether of conduct, or hiſtory, upon no ſolid foundation either of religious, moral, or ſocial principles. The ſceptick in every other branch of ſcience muſt, in order to be conſiſtent with himſelf, be equally ſo in the foundations of the political. It could not indeed be expected, that he ſhould have any principles of policy to fix him, except thoſe of prejudice, perſonal intereſt, particular temporary affection, or reſentment, who diſavow'd almoſt all other acknowledged elements of ſcience, on which the ſure foundation of politicks is laid: and how unſteadily perſonal motives are likely to influence, the conduct of that author hath ſufficiently proved.

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One general caution then to men of *all* profeſſions naturally occurs, very conſonant to chriſtian religion; naturally preſervative of ſocial peace; proper to be inculcated in theſe days: not to be fond of diſpute; nor, for the ſake of ſhewing ſingular abilities, or a ſingular refinement in philoſophy, ſtudious to contradict, what mankind hath univerſally acknowledged: for the conſequences of ſuch a temper may lead men further, than they at firſt intended, till they come at length to that inveterate bigotry againſt truth, that their determination, agreeable to the expreſſion of an ancient Roman, ſhall be, *etiamſi perſuaſeris, tamen non perſuadebis.*

Let the youthful mind eſpecially be cautious, how it ſets ſail in this dangerous ocean of doubtfulneſs, without any ballaſt, without any rudder, without any certain point of land in view. We ſee how many have been ſhipwrecked in old age, who thus have ſet out in youth. We ſee many that have wandered all their life long upon the ſea of error; ſometimes indeed enjoying for a few hours an apparent ſun-ſhine; but oftener obſcured in clouds, or thick darkneſs, and ever afraid to land.

Finally, my brethren, engaged in the miniſtry of the word of truth, or in preparation for that miniſtry, let us carry one remark ever with us,

us, for our encouragment; that as all our knowledge is in a progreſſive ſtate, and will probably continue ſo for ever, ſo according to our improvements, and the application we have made of our knowledge here, in the ſervice of our great maſter, amidſt his creatures, we ſhall preſerve a proportionable ſtation of eminence hereafter in our future life; always approaching nearer to our creator, though ſtill even in an infinite progreſs, at an infinite diſtance from him. Yet thus improving, and thus refined, ſhall ye be as lights diſtinguiſhed in the heavens, above many of leſſer glory, whom your knowledge may have inſtructed; and whom either by authority, perſuaſion, example, or due diſtribution of civil ſanctions, you may in the end have led to happineſs; *when they that be wiſe ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, and they that have turned many to righteouſneſs, as the ſtars for ever and ever.*

FINIS.

N.B. The foregoing references are made to the large edition of the letters on the ſtudy and uſe of hiſtory, vol. 1. printed 1752.

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